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No. 102

American Embassy,  
Tehran, Iran, April 8, 1948SECRETSubject: Translating Newspaper Articles regarding Helmand  
River dispute.rec'd  
Apr. 26

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE,

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Sir:

I have the honor to transmit a translation of two articles appearing in the JOURNAL DE TEHRAN for March 14 and 15, 1948, entitled "Drought Threatens Seistan", giving the account of an interview with an Iranian officer, Colonel Safapur, who recently returned to Tehran after spending 3½ years as Boundary Commissioner at Zabol in Seistan province. Colonel Safapur, it will be recalled, was one of the members of the joint Irano-Afghan Commission which visited the Helmand basin during the summer of 1947. His name appears as one of the signatories of the procès verbal of that commission which was transmitted to the Department as enclosure No. 9 to the Embassy's despatch No. 565 of December 9, 1947.

This translation, made from the local French-language paper, was compared with an account of the same interview given in the Persian-language ETELAAT and is believed to be as nearly accurate as possible as regards place names and the like. It will be observed that Colonel Safapur expresses in somewhat forceful terms the official Iranian viewpoint that the Afghans are deliberately holding back the waters of the Helmand, thereby bringing drought and misfortune to the inhabitants of Seistan province and compelling them all eventually to emigrate into Afghanistan. In this connection he asserts:

"I assure you that if emigration continues at the present rate, within a year there will not remain a living soul in all the territory of Seistan."

The interview gives some details regarding the alleged construction of dams and canals above the point where the Helmand enters Iran, which were also mentioned by the Governor of Iranian Baluchistan in a conversation with an officer of the Embassy reported in the Embassy's despatch No. 63 of March 3, 1948. Colonel Safapur also reiterates categorically the Iranian contention that a distinction is to be made between Band-e-Kamal Khan and Bandar-e-Kamal Khan (identified in the French version of the interview as the Kamal Khan dam and the Kamal Khan port, respectively), it being, of course, the contention of the Iranians

that the

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that the water of the river should be divided between the two countries at Band-e-Kamal Khan rather than further downstream at Bandar-e-Kamal Khan.

In this latter connection the Embassy has noted the suggestion made in Kabul's telegram of March 18, 1948 (repeated to Tehran as 2), that the confusion between these two names may be due to an incorrect translation of clauses 2 and 3 of the McMahon award of 1905. The Embassy is unable to check this point with the original text since the set of documents transmitted to the Department with the Embassy's despatch No. 565 of December 9, 1947, constituted the only set obtained from the Iranian Government. From the Embassy's investigations, however, as well as from discussions of the matter with Embassy translators and other persons familiar with the Persian language, it seems fairly certain that the two names are, in fact, different and that they are so written in the various documents pertaining to the Helmand dispute. The Department should, however, be in a position to settle this question from an examination of the original documents, as well as the official English text mentioned in the Kabul Legation's telegram which, likewise, is not available to the Embassy.

The Department may wish to note that it would be a fairly simple matter to confuse the words "Band" and "Bandar" as written in Persian بند and بندر, respectively. (The enclitic "e" which is usually written after both words in English is not actually written in the Persian.)

The Embassy will be interested to learn the results of the Department's researches on this point. The other place-names mentioned by Colonel Safapur will mostly be found on the official Iranian Government map enclosed with the Embassy's despatch No. 565 or the rough sketch map enclosed with the Embassy's despatch No. 493 of September 18, 1947, as well as that appended to CIR report No. 4509 prepared in the Department.

In fairness to the Afghan position, it must be conceded, with respect to the point which Colonel Safapur was apparently trying to make toward the end of the interview, when he states that if the water were divided at Bandar-e-Kamal Khan (as desired by the Afghans) rather than at Band-e-Kamal Khan (as desired by the Iranians), Iran would lose the water of Saleh-e-Fath, Chahar Borjah, Kholmak and Rudbar, that his reasoning does not appear wholly correct. One might assume from his statement that the four points in question lie between Bandar-e-Kamal Khan and Band-e-Kamal Khan, but an examination of the maps shows that this is true in the case of only three of the localities, Saleh-e-Fath being downstream from Bandar-e-Kamal Khan. In any event, however, the basic contention of the Iranians that Iran will benefit from the water's being divided further upstream is not to be affected by this slight discrepancy.

The Embassy has noted with interest the references in Kabul's telegram of March 18, 1948, and London's telegram of March 22, 1948 (1172 to the Department, repeated to Tehran as 25), that the discussions now going on in Washington between Iranian and Afghan representatives might be facilitated by an examination of the McMahon report, which is described as comprising 1,000 pages in five volumes. As regards paragraph two

of London's

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of London's telegram under reference, the Embassy agrees that it is doubtful that the Iranian Government has a copy of this report. It is believed that the document which the British Foreign Office apparently believes to have been shown by the Iranian Government to this Embassy must be the McMahon award enclosed with the Embassy's despatch No. 565, not the McMahon report.

As regards the possibility of referring the matter to the United Nations (paragraph 8 of London's telegram) the reference is probably to the Iranian decision of last summer to do so, which was reported in the Embassy's telegram 912 of September 23, 1947, but which later proved abortive.

The Embassy has received the Department's confidential instruction No. 17 of March 16, 1948, enclosing a copy of the memorandum concerning the formation of a technical commission to study the Helmand question, which was recently handed to Iranian and Afghan representatives in Washington. This proposal appears to the Embassy to have considerable merit, and it is to be hoped that the two governments will agree to the formation of such a body.

The Embassy, which has just learned that recent rains which have taken place in the Helmand basin have brought a very considerable quantity of water to Iranian Seistan, is seeking further information as to whether this is a temporary condition or whether there is any likelihood of a serious improvement in the desperate situation in that area as described by Colonel Safapur in his interview.

Respectfully yours,

For the Ambassador:

Evan L. Wilson  
First Secretary of Embassy

Enclosure:

Translation of newspaper articles.

File No. 800

Wilson:vcn

To Department in original and hectograph.

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Copies to: London  
Kabul

Translation from JOURNAL DE TEHRAN, March 14 and 15, 1948.

DROUGHT THREATENS SEISTAN

Colonel Safapur, who for three and one-half years has been Boundary Commissioner in Seistan, has just returned to Tehran and has granted us an interview.

Asked whether Seistan has suffered greatly as a result of lack of water, Colonel Safapur said:

"This year has been one of the most unhappy that the inhabitants of Seistan have ever gone through.

"It is impossible to describe the anxiety and the misfortune of this province. And to understand them it would be necessary to go to Seistan and observe the situation on the spot.

"From the 1st of Fardad\* in the villages and from the 17th of Kordad\*\* in the town, water was completely lacking. Until the 17th of Aban\*\*\* the population made use of well water. However, the wells cannot be utilized more than three or four days in succession, for after a too steady use of the water it changes in taste.

"It goes without saying that the agricultural situation, given the lack of water, has been most critical. As an indication of this I will add that this year only two-fifths of the land was cultivated.

"The inhabitants of Seistan now find themselves obliged to emigrate to Afghanistan after selling their land and property to the big landowners at reduced prices.

"If this state of things continues, that is to say, if emigration to Afghanistan is not checked, the big landowners themselves will be unable to put their vast domains to use. I assure you that if emigration continues at the present rate, within a year there will not remain a living soul in all the territory of Seistan.

"Moreover, the great Hamoun lake, one of the most famous in Iran, with a length of 120 kilometers and a width of 18 kilometers, is nearly dry today and appears as a vast dry plain over which we passed on camelback."

"How do the Afghans utilize the water of the Helmand?"

Colonel

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\* May 22

\*\* August 8

\*\*\* November 8

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Colonel Safapur replied:

"The Afghans have constructed dams on the other side of the river at more than 40 points, to divert the water of the Helmand into their territory. One of the most important dams is that of Saraj, built under the reign of Amir Amanollah Khan more than thirty years ago. A large canal, into which the water of the Helmand flows, irrigates vast stretches of land in Afghanistan. The greatest part of the drought in Zabol is due to the existence of these dams which begin on the other bank of the river at a point opposite the town of Girishk and which extend to the Irano-Afghan border. The most important of these dams have been built at Qaleh-e-Fath, Chahar Borjak and Khajeh-Ali. The Afghans are engaged in constructing a dam bigger than all the others. It is called Boghra and if the Afghans ever put it into use I can affirm that we will have to give up, once and for all, not only Zabol but even all of Seistan. The height and extent of this dam are such that it would absolutely prevent the flow of the water of the Helmand into Iran. This latter dam with a canal of the same name is located 40 leagues from the Iranian border south of Girishk. It is possible that it will be put into operation in two years' time. The Afghans will not only use this dam for agriculture and for the development of their economy but at the same time they will have the advantage of the immigration of Iranians into the territory as the result of the drought.

"The eventual emigrants can be estimated at nearly 250,000 persons, so that it can be seen that Afghanistan will have its population increased by several hundreds of thousands of inhabitants if the dam of Boghra is completed and put into use."

"Are the Iranian authorities aware of this situation; have they received reports on this subject?" our reporter asked Colonel Safapur, who replied:

"Ever since my arrival at Zabol in 1323 I have been sending detailed reports to Tehran on the different problems relative to the province of Seistan and particularly concerning the Helmand. I do not know whether the Iranian authorities have acted upon my reports but on returning to Tehran I conferred with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on this subject and mentioned Seistan, and he assured me that the problem was not as serious as I thought. He actually told me that the digging of the Boghra canal could in no way diminish the volume of water of the Helmand, whereas I personally know that the inhabitants of Zabol think exactly the opposite."

"Were you charged by the government to inquire into the Helmand problem during your stay in Zabol?"

To this question Colonel Safapur replied:

"On two occasions I was instructed to proceed to Afghanistan  
to study

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\* 1944-45.

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to study the situation on the spot. Once was in 1325\* to see the dams built by the Afghans on the other bank of the river. Unfortunately I was prevented by the Afghan authorities from passing beyond Qaleh-e-Fath. However, in the course of this mission I managed just the same to visit some dams of less importance. My second mission was entrusted to me in the course of the present year.\*\* I was instructed to proceed with a delegation including representatives of Iran and Afghanistan to the Kamal Khan dam (Band-e-Kamal Khan) and in accordance with instructions from Tehran to divide the Helmand water in half, at Band-e-Kamal Khan, which is situated between Zabol in Iran and Chakhansur in Afghanistan. But unfortunately this time again the Afghans barred my passage and prevented me from accomplishing my mission. I gained the impression that the Afghans wished to make it absolutely impossible for me to visit Band-e-Kamal Khan as they did not wish the water to be divided on the basis of the instructions of the Iranian authorities.

"In order to be more precise I will add that the dam of Kamal Khan and the port of the same name are different places and that the Iranian Government wished to carry out the division of the water at the Kamal Khan dam\*\*\* whereas the Afghan authorities desired to carry it out at the Kamal Khan port."\*\*\*\*

In reply to the question whether the Kamal Khan dam\*\*\* and the Kamal Khan port\*\*\*\* were differed especially from each other, Colonel Safapur replied: "Completely. The Kamal Khan port\*\*\*\* is closer to the Iranian frontier than the dam.

"If the division of the water takes place at the Kamal Khan port,\*\*\*\* the water of Qaleh-e-Fath, Chahar Borjak, Khalmak and Audbar will be lost to Iran. If, on the other hand, the division takes place at the Kamal Khan dam,\*\*\* that cannot fail to benefit the entire territory of Seistan."

"When the Afghans prevented you from proceeding to the Kamal Khan dam,\*\*\* did you take the necessary measures?"

"We immediately lodged a protest with the Afghan authorities, pointing out to them that if the digging of the canals did not damage the interest of Iran, there was no reason why they should prevent us from proceeding to our objective. Subsequently, after two days of negotiations and argument, a clear and concise proces-verbal was drawn up and signed by the two delegations.

"The proces-verbal points out that the Afghans prevented the Iranian delegation from proceeding to the Kamal Khan dam,\*\*\* moreover the proces-verbal was attached to a detailed report addressed to Tehran. But it seems to me that the government has not paid any attention either to the proces-verbal or to the report which accompanied it."

\* 1946-47

\*\* i.e., The Iranian year  
March 21, 1947 to March 20,  
1948.

\*\*\* Band-e-Kamal Khan

\*\*\*\* Bandar-e-Kamal Khan

Translated by: E. Wilson:rlt/vcm